THE TRUTH TOLD SLANT:
EMILY DICKINSON AND A DEFENSE OF A LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

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The value of a liberal arts education is relentlessly debated, especially in the 21st century where STEM and business are growing increasingly important to the job market. Because many people are deeming a liberal arts education less valuable than the aforementioned vocational fields, both funding for and enrollment in the liberal arts has declined consistently over the past 50 years.

This thesis is a defense of the liberal arts education that reveals its value by looking at the foundation of the University of Texas at Austin (UT) through the lens of Emily Dickinson's poetry. The question this paper explores is what is the true value of a liberal arts education? And how does studying a liberal arts subject like poetry, which is often considered frivolous and irrelevant to the "real world," give students the type of education that UT strives to give them?

Beginning by exploring UT's foundation, mission, and values, this thesis reveals that the liberal arts are the core of the University of Texas at Austin. It then discusses the power of poetry and the poet Emily Dickinson, and chapters 2-6 each delve into various themes that are present both in the foundation of UT as well as in Dickinson's poems. The analyses of various Dickinson poems included in these chapters reveal how studying the liberal arts gives students an "education for a life, not just a living," and the entirety of this thesis shows how a liberal arts education equips students to truly make a difference in the world, as UT's motto promises.

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I want to dedicate this thesis to my father, who boldly and courageously upholds every value of UT Austin through his integrity, honesty and fairness, in his constant pursuit of the Truth.

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This thesis is a product of my love for the Plan II Honors program and of the time my teachers over the years have invested in me and my education. Plan II fostered my love for the liberal arts, but there are many people I have to thank for helping me become the person I am and for helping me grow into someone who could write this thesis and discover and articulate her beliefs with conviction.

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1.1: Liberal Arts as the Foundation of UT

The Plan II Honors program at the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) prides itself on giving its students "an education for a life, not a living" (Plan II website: "Curriculum"). Some may cringe at the latter half of that motto, believing that the ability to earn a living is the ultimate purpose of college. Some may not even be able to differentiate between a life and a living; but the difference between the two is real, and it is incredibly important to recognize in order to lead a 'good' life and positively impact the world. I find it interesting that a life and a living have somewhat become mutually exclusive in our world today. Shouldn't they go hand in hand? Shouldn't a living be only one part of a person's life? And more importantly, which one will help a person accomplish what is truly meaningful or what has genuine purpose in his or her world, in *the* world? The motto of the University of Texas at Austin is "what starts here changes the world," and thousands of students flock to the university each year in the pursuit of doing just that. They want to change the world, leave their mark, and make a positive impact. So it seems the real question is how do we, or rather, how *will* we, change the world? Do we do it through STEM? Through business? We may make a difference by receiving an education in those fields, but before we can do that we need to have a more fundamental knowledge and understanding of what matters in the world and an education in what is right and how to make decisions in our own lives.

H.T. Parlin founded the Plan II Honors Program at UT Austin in 1935 (Plan II website: "The History of Plan II Honors"). Consistent with the values of UT, Parlin believed that getting a 'good' education meant more than simply learning a trade, and in an attempt to ensure that UT Austin did not become a strictly vocational school, he established this renowned liberal arts

program. He identified the new program's technical objectives as "progress and a unifying purpose" and its educational objective as "enlightenment, the best sort of preparation for citizenship" (Plan II website: "The History of Plan II Honors"). The program's website states that Plan II "stresses the importance of the individual in society, and…aims at an exploration of human values that ought to temper learning with human feeling, give a proper perspective, and as much humane experience" that a college student can attain before graduation (Plan II website: "The History of Plan II Honors"). To teach students these things, Plan II requires a breadth of classes to help them expand their understanding and perspective. These classes include, but are not limited to, world literature, social science, philosophy, non-U.S. histories, modes of reasoning, sciences, foreign language, humanities, fine arts, visual arts and general culture classes, and a series of exploratory seminar courses (Plan II website: "Explanation of the Plan II Curriculum"). While Plan II is a particularly prestigious liberal arts program, its core purpose and objectives are similar to nearly all liberal arts programs in the United States.

Business, STEM, and other vocational fields can—and do—undeniably make our world a better place, but we do not change the world solely by earning a living doing jobs in these areas; we do it by receiving an education for a life and by then living that life well. Knowledge and intelligence are only pieces of the equipment needed to create a better world. Virtue, or behavior showing high moral standards and conformity to a standard of right, is the other (Merriam-Webster.com). "Father of Texas," Stephen F. Austin, believed that "a nation can only be free, happy, and great in proportion to the virtue and intelligence of the people," and this credo is inscribed in the very structure of the state's flagship university (UT Tower Library). Students at UT are admitted to the university based on their intelligence; that leaves the purpose of the university being to instill in its students the virtue to use that intelligence in a way that benefits

society. The first step in changing the world is to study the liberal arts, build a foundation, understand yourself, learn what is right, learn what matters, and proceed from there.

The University of Texas at Austin website states that the institution's core purpose is "to transform lives for the benefit of society" (UT website: "Mission & Values"). The site lists learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility as the core values that students of the university should embody, implying that upholding these values will give a person the power to change lives and therefore the world. Below the core purpose, UT's code of conduct then states that "Each member of the university is expected to uphold these [aforementioned] values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect towards peers and community" (UT website: "Mission & Values"). Through this statement, the code of conduct equips students with knowledge of the tools they will need to change the world, and in two brief sentences, it teaches someone what kind of person he or she will need to be to become a transforming force in another person's life. Neither the school's mission statement, nor its motto, nor its code of conduct mention a word about excelling in technical classes at the university; rather, they all place the emphasis on being a kind, moral, and honest person. These proclamations on which UT was founded assert that if we want to change the world, what we should aim to learn in college is who we are, what is right, and *how* to make and be the change we wish to see.

One of the oldest buildings on the Forty Acres of UT Austin is the iconic Tower, and that Tower is what the university is both literally and figuratively built upon. This building is the symbol of UT, immediately recognizable and an iconic shape that represents the university both literally and metaphorically. Across the front of the majestic limestone tower, the words "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" are deeply and boldly engraved across

the sturdy base of the building, just above the entrance (UT Tower Exterior). Therefore, as a person approaches the Tower, truth is the first value of UT that he or she will see, one that is integral to that person changing the world, which is conveyed to that person because these are the only words that are carved into the building's exterior. Once inside, the second floor of the Tower has a picturesque library that looks as if it has not changed since the building opened in 1937. Plaques in various languages hang just outside its doors in a plethora of languages, from Latin to English to French, but the true beauty and wisdom lies on the ceilings of what has now become the library's quiet study room. The high ceiling is exquisitely painted with colorful patterns, and the thick wooden beams that hold up the 300-foot symbol of our school bear dozens of quotations, painted in gold.

These quotations come from all realms of history and are attributed to a vast variety of sources, including the Bible, novelists, philosophers, and public leaders from all around the world and from various time periods throughout history. These voices of wisdom echo the first value the Tower reflects, even repeating Jesus's words: "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." One quotation also iterates how the students of the UT Austin should strive to live by seeking the truth, proclaiming, "Let us in this university strike hands with the ancient and goodly fellowship of university men of all time…and pledge ourselves, as university men and Texans, to love the truth, and seek it, to learn the right and do it" (UT Tower Library). This quotation, the only one that is unattributed on the Tower library's beams, insinuates that a university man (or woman), and a Texan man (or woman) in general, should pledge to both love the truth and to seek it in order to live a good life. More notably, this quotation ties the truth to "the right" (UT Tower Library). The sentence structure, combined with the meaning of the

words, implies that seeking the truth will lead a person to learn what is right, and then to do what is right, which can be interpreted as what is moral, ethical, and for the good of the people.

Many of the words along these walls also advise students of the university on how to live a good life and how to be successful—not in business—but as a person. These life lessons cover topics such as friendship, honesty, morality, generosity, selflessness, freedom, and patriotism. These are various ingredients to being successful as a person and as a human, rather than being successful in business, which is the background against which our society has evolved to view the term 'success.' By exceling in the areas of life that are written about on the Tower's ceiling beams, the foundation of what a university student is meant to absorb in college, a person will be closer to becoming 'successful.'

Friendship and integrity are two of these stepping-stones to succeeding as a person that are detailed on the ceiling beams. Ralph Waldo Emerson, a renowned American essayist, lecturer, and poet, advises us on *how* to make friends, his words urging that "The only way to have a friend is to be one," and English writer Samuel Johnson teaches us about the importance of *having* those friends, proclaiming that "If a man does not make a new acquaintance, as he advances through life, he will soon find himself left alone. A man, sir, should keep his friendship in constant repair" (UT Tower Library). A few beams down, Pascal, the French mathematician and physicist, reminds us of the importance of integrity in everyday life, stating that "The strength of a man's virtue is not to be measured by the efforts he makes under pressure but by his ordinary conduct" (UT Tower Library). And finally, on a beam at the other end of the library, English poet and cultural critic Matthew Arnold's words are reminiscent of Pascal's, supplementing his words by saying that "conduct is three-fourths of our life and its largest concern" (UT Tower Library).

There are no quotations scrawled in gold paint across the beams of the Tower library that discuss wealth or vocational knowledge or professional success. All of the words of wisdom branded on UT Austin's walls are words of advice about living a worthy life. Students come to UT because what starts here changes the world. So how do we change the world? We change it by soaking in the wisdom from the teachers who left their mark in the form of words on our library's ceiling. We do it by upholding the university's core values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect towards other. The kinds of classes that teach you these human qualities are not accounting or engineering or business. Those types of studies consist of a lot of information, but not a lot of wisdom. As E.O. Wilson, an American biologist, researcher, theorist, naturalist, and author, once said, "We are drowning in information, while starving for wisdom," which accurately describes our society's current state (Zakaria 9).

A person learns how to be honest, trustworthy, and have integrity and all of the aforementioned qualities by soaking in wisdom, not information, and they do so by studying fields like philosophy, theology, world literature, ethics, history, and more. We learn how to change the world by studying the liberal arts, a field in which a great majority of the men who spoke and wrote the words on our Tower's library beams made their own mark on the world. This is not to say that vocational fields of study do not change the world, because they do. Our world would not be what it is today without the scientific advances in medicine and technology, or without the governmental institutions that shape our society. However, a foundation in the liberal arts is key to knowing how to change the world, and it equips students to become people who can change it and to understand the ways *in which* they should change it to positively transform others' lives. The liberal arts teach us to "love the truth, and seek it, [and] to learn the right and do it" (UT Tower Library).

Literature and essays are common sources for the words and themes of the wisdom painted onto the Tower library's beams. From these beams, the English philosopher Francis Bacon advises students that they should "read not to contradict and confute; nor to believe and take for granted; nor to find talk and discourse; but to weigh and consider" (UT Tower Library). Scottish philosopher, Thomas Carlyle's quotation on the Tower's ceiling reads, "all that mankind has done, thought, gained, or been, is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of books" (UT Tower Library). Finally, English Christian theologian and mathematician Isaac Barrow inspires students to read literature and study by telling them that "he that loveth a book will never want a faithful friend, a wholesome counselor, a cheerful companion, an effectual comforter" (UT Tower Library).

Another common theme on these beams is the importance of maintaining one's integrity and knowing oneself. An ancient Roman Emperor, Marcus Aurelius' words are painted onto the Tower, reminding us that nothing that creates or promotes dishonesty can be advantageous to anyone and that actions that cause a person to lose respect for him or herself should never be carried out. His warning is to "never esteem anything as of advantage to thee that shall make thee break thy word or lose thy self-respect" (UT Tower Library). In a similar tone, Yancey Lewis, a UT alum and dean of the UT Austin Law School from 1902-1904, born nearly 2000 years after Marcus Aurelius, advises us to never give in to something that isn't right and to stand up for what we believe and for the change we want to make. His golden words read, "and, in all emergencies, however wealth may tempt popular applause allure, to be sole rulers of our own free speech, masters of our own untrammelled thoughts, [and] captains of our own unfettered souls" (UT Tower Library).

Finally, there are a substantial number of theological quotations painted on the beams. The majority of these religious quotations are of a Christian or Jewish belief, but there are words of leaders from other religions present on the beams as well. As previously mentioned, Jesus's own words regarding truth and freedom are preserved on the library ceiling, and there are psalms from the Christian bible present too. Psalm 19 reads, "the heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament showeth His handiwork," and Psalm 46 declares that "God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble" (UT Tower Library). A passage spoken by the angels of Bethlehem reads "glory to God in the highest" and then reiterates UT's core virtue of respect towards others by finishing "and on earth peace, good will towards men" (UT Tower Library). One quotation of Islam origin is attributed to Sa'di of Shiraz, a major Persian literary man and poet who lived during the medieval period, and it states that "for us, to earn our bread, the cloud, the breeze, sun, moon, and sky with busy motion toil, that we may eat, remembering God the while; should man serve less obediently than these?" (UT Tower Library). The religious presence of these words in the Tower library can most likely be attributed to the more religion-dependent society and time during which UT Austin was founded, but these ancient spiritual words also carry with them some of the core values of the university, primarily mutual respect and good will towards others, selflessness, and the quest for truth.

This thesis will be a defense of the liberal arts, because I believe a liberal education needs to be defended and yet has few defenders. For the past fifty years, the liberal arts have been the first area of American higher education to be defunded, disregarded, and cast off as unimportant—second only to the creative and fine arts that are in survival mode as their funds are drying up even more rapidly than liberal education funding. The governors of Texas, North Carolina, Florida, and Wisconsin have even publicly announced "that they do not intend to keep

subsidizing the liberal arts at state-funded universities" (Zakaria 19). They argue that it is not a vital interest of their states to train more anthropologists, philosophers, or any other students who don't have an immediate and specific job path right out of college (Zakaria 19).

The reason for this defunding is that there are few supporters of a liberal education (Zakaria 16). Conservatives feel that it is too liberal, liberals feel it is too elitist, students worry about what they will do or what kind of jobs they can get with a psychology or English degree, and parents worry that it will cost them their life savings (Zakaria 16). These are a few of the reasons that the liberal arts education has been increasingly considered and publicly denounced as a waste of time and money; this is also amplified in our modern-day, profit-obsessed society that is defined by globalization and skills-based learning (Zakaria 16). Often this is simply because "Students and families need help in understanding how the liberal arts contribute to personal development and career opportunity," which is my intention for this thesis (Barker 10). This denunciation is curious though, because around the world, the idea of a "broad based 'liberal' education is closely tied to the United States" and its incredible universities and colleges; however, in America itself, "a liberal education is out of favor" (Zakaria 15).

Over the last century, people have begun to question the value of a liberal arts education, asking things like, why fund the study of dead languages when they are dead? Why spend a fortune to get a college degree in literature written hundreds of years ago when that degree leaves you nearly unemployable upon your completion of university? And why study poets, philosophers, history, religion, languages, ethics, world literature, and scholars whose ancient studies that are no longer considered a 'necessity' or even an advantage to achieving employment in our job market? In this thesis I will argue that while all of these questions may highlight valid points, the liberal arts are integral to students becoming the kind of people who

will change the world for good, because without knowledge of ethics, history, religion, literature, and the self, the value of vocational knowledge is diminished exponentially in UT's mission to educate students to be able to positively transform others' lives. Wisdom and knowledge are what most people seek when they go to college to receive a higher education, but wisdom does not come without understanding of the greater world around you. Just as the Proverbs of Solomon say and as they read on the Tower's ceiling beams, "Wisdom is the principal thing: therefore get wisdom and with all thy getting get understanding" (UT Tower Library).

Perhaps the most important thing the liberal arts education teaches students is how to think. I realize that this is very vague, but in order for students learn about themselves, the world around them, and how they feel about various aspects of the world, they need to know how to think clearly, analytically, and critically, and a classical liberal arts education does that exactly by teaching students how to write clearly. A person can only write clearly if he has learned how to think clearly, because making the connection between thoughts and feelings and written words is an invaluable skill (Zakaria 72). In the technology-driven world we live in today, written communication has become exceedingly important, and the ability to "write clearly, cleanly, and reasonably quickly"—an ability that most who have it learned from a liberal arts education—is becoming more and more rare (Zakaria 72).

The reason this matters is because with this devaluing of the liberal arts education, "the percentage of students majoring in subjects like English and philosophy has declined sharply" (Zakaria 16). For example, in 1971 nearly eight percent of all bachelor's degrees in the US were awarded in subjects like English and literature. Forty-one years later in 2012, that number had fallen to a mere three percent of undergraduate degrees (Zakaria 16). Not only that, but during the same time period, the "percentage of business majors in the undergraduate population rose

from 13.7 to 20.5" (Zakaria 16). The misconception that the liberal arts lack worth most often comes from "students and families who are sacrificing time and money and are eager for a practical return on their investment," and without the immediate return on investment that business and vocational majors more often see, the value of a liberal arts education "is not immediately apparent" (Roche 2). This is a massive increase in business majors, and these numbers are proof that a liberal education is in need of a defender, because even "many educators see [skills-based learning] as the only way" for students to stay competitive in the job market and for our nation to stay competitive in the global market (Zakaria 16).

"An open-ended exploration of knowledge is seen as a road to nowhere," and throughout this thesis I will show why this view is incorrect and reveal where the exploratory road of the liberal arts truly leads (Zakaria 16). In the following pages, I will make an argument for the liberal arts by telling the truth about their true value; however, just as the title of this thesis indicates, I will do so by telling a "slanted truth," but this does not mean it is not a truth. In fact, I will tell all the truth, but I will tell it "slant," just as Emily Dickinson says to do. What does this mean? Think about light and the physics of light rays (which I only know because I took the Plan II Physics course). When an uninterrupted beam of light shines in a dark room, it illuminates something on the wall where the beam of light hits. However, if you insert a reflective surface like a mirror into the dark room and bend the beam of light by interrupting its path, the light is still the same light, but it illuminates a different spot on the wall because you bent it. That is the way in which I am using the term slant, where the light is the truth, my thesis is a reflective surface, and the spot illuminated on the wall is the argument I am trying to make. I will simply be telling the truth about the value of a liberal arts education from another perspective, one that

others may not have looked at before, in order to make you think and to contribute to the conversation.

But in the spirit of poetry and of *slanted-ness,* a "slanted" truth can be interpreted in more than one way. Another way to look at how I am slanting the truth is in a similar way, but by considering a pair of reading glasses and how they work. For people who are near- or far-sighted and can only see things clearly if they are very close to them or far from them, glasses help them see what is unclear or out of focus to their naked eye. Glasses have specially created lenses, or small pieces of glass, that bend and refract rays of light just enough to focus the image for the person to see clearly. In terms of this slanted argument I will make in support of the liberal arts, this thesis is the glasses through which my readers will be looking, and by doing so, they will be able to see the object that was previously out of focus or unclear to them, and that soon-to-be clear object is the value of a liberal arts education. The lens through which I will be shining this beam of truth to make the world clearer for my readers is the poet Emily Dickinson and her poetry, which I will further explain in the next section.

1.2: The Power of Poetry & Emily Dickinson

Reading the words along the beams of the Tower ceiling, amongst the words of philosophers, theologians, and historical figures, I notice a handful of renowned poets' words painted in gold. Poetry is a genre of literature and can take many forms, but generally, a poem is a literary work in which special intensity is given to the expression of feelings and ideas by the use of distinctive style and rhythm (Oxford English Dictionary). It is a creative, sometimes beautiful, and often thought-provoking outlet of expression, ideas, and emotions. But, does

poetry matter? The debate over the value of poetry and the value of an education involving poetry has been ongoing, much like that of the liberal arts umbrella under which its study falls.

In 2010, the New York Times asked, "Does Poetry Matter?" and opened up an online discussion forum to the public ("Does Poetry Matter?"). It might be better to look at this in a different way; "You can tell that a medium is still vital by posing the question: Can it change anything?" (Petri). Poetry can. In the discussion forum for the New York Times, contributors fell on both sides of the debate, asking probing questions and declaring their opinions. Some argued that poetry matters only to poets, while others argued that it should matter to everyone, but the consensus amongst readers seemed to be that unfortunately, poetry "is clearly a dying form of art within the publishing community" ("Does Poetry Matter?"). An article published in 2013 by The Washington Post supported this assertion by those New York Times readers (Petri).

Determining whether or not a medium can change anything in the greater community and world is a valid manner of measuring the vitality of a scholarly subject, because if knowledge of something cannot equip someone to make a positive change in someone's world (including their own), then that area of study is not worth his or her time and effort (Petri). The Washington Post article proceeds to ask whether a poem can still change anything, and the article concludes that "the medium [of poetry] might not be loud enough any longer" to inspire any change in the world or to equip someone to make a change (Petri). Yet still, chosen to be painted on the beams of the ceiling of the university that is intended to be the starting place of what will change the world are poets' words. So, are the New York Times readers wrong? Are the publishers at The Washington Post? I believe they are.

David Orr, the poetry critic for the New York Times, published a book in 2011 titled *Beautiful & Pointless: A Guide to Modern Poetry.* Rather than delve into specific poems, his

short, six-chapter book explores general themes present in poetry in an attempt to demystify it for skeptics and those who are deterred by its obscurity. The culmination of the exploratory book is when Orr asks the question, why bother reading poetry at all? He answers by explaining that he reads poetry "because it helps him negotiate the world around him and understand his own feelings about that world" ("A Poetry Critic Asks: Why Bother?"). The way to approach the question he poses is not to answer it, but instead to understand that if a person *does* bother to read poetry, it can be worthwhile ("A Poetry Critic Asks: Why Bother?"). As Orr implies, poetry is not dead and it is not powerless to change the world, which we know because it is not powerless to change a person or a person's perspective. Poetry, like the liberal arts umbrella in general, helps students understand themselves, the world around them, and the way they feel about that world ("A Poetry Critic Asks: Why Bother?"). Poetry is powerful. It does not always—actually it almost never—hands its reader a clear and direct answer to a question or a problem; rather, it forces him or her to think about the issue, and it inspires the reader to contribute to the conversation in a productive way.

Poetry's potential is illustrated in the impact it had on Russia while it was under a totalitarian state between 1917 and 1991. Dominant Russian communists of the time feared impoverished poets because of the influential potential these poets' words inherently held (McSmith). This power came from the revolutionary ideas poems expressed and to the threatening (towards the government) possibilities to which they alluded, the ease with which someone could recall and verbally share poems and their messages, and the hope and 'push back' these poems instilled in a population that was living in "total fear…during the very severe period of mass terror, Stalin's repressions" ("An Unexpected Revival For A Beloved Russian Poet"). Poets were so feared by these Russian communists that they would round up Russian poets and

kill them because they were terrified of the power they possessed (McSmith). In this place and this time, poetry was a very economical way of keeping hope alive, engendering determination for freedom in a country, and uniting people to seek what was right.

Not only can poetry unite people against a greater force, but the idea of poetry providing readers freedom, which is defined by UT as "to seek the truth and express it," and this power to give and inspire freedom is still very relevant in our world today (UT Tower Library). A *New York Times Magazine* article written in 2012 describes how women from the rural provinces of Afghanistan value poetry so much that they are currently risking their lives to read and study poetry (Griswold). Risking their lives for poetry? Why are they doing this? These women go to such lengths to grasp a bit of the freedom that poetry gives them because poetry is the only education that many of them will receive, since it is easily transferred verbally as well as in writing (Griswold). These women risk their lives to share bits of poetry with each other surreptitiously over cell phones and in top-secret gatherings because "in writing and reciting their poems, these women [are able to] give voice to the fears and injustices—and to the hopes and dreams—that define their lives" (Prior). Poetry gives them a voice, which is what makes it worth dying—and living—for (Prior). Perhaps this is why we so frequently devalue poetry in the United States, because we all already have voices for which people have fought and died for, and our voices are "amplified to deafening decibels" by the hundreds of social media outlets, television shows, smart phones, by the "like" and "dislike" buttons, and by virtually everything in which we participate (Prior). Maybe our freedom of voice and of being is so prevalent and commonplace to us that we have forgotten, or maybe never thought about, the "death-defying power poetry has to offer a life-giving voice" (Prior).

Somehow poetry is stronger than ordinary language. Why did totalitarians fear it, and how was it so critical to these Afghan women's self-expression? Perhaps its power comes in part from the breadth of ideas it is able to explore in so few words, pieced together so carefully. And maybe its strength is because poetry expresses through indirection, often saying one thing and meaning another, as this would make it hard to censor or control unless the person doing the censoring had studied that particular poem or poet. Or perhaps it is because poetry is so incredibly timeless. Long after poets pass away, their works remain, and somehow, hundreds of years after their death, readers still find their words relevant and relatable. Regardless of whether one of these is the source of poetry's ability to influence, or whether it is a combination of the three, Emily Dickinson's poetry is undoubtedly influential, cryptic, and timeless.

As I read the quotations in the Tower library, I am struck by the similarities between the themes present there—not only in the poets' words, but in all the words and wisdom—to the themes and motifs in a particular poet's works. It dawned on me as I read that the ideas and discussions of literature, integrity, knowing oneself, religion, and the circle of life and death painted carefully in gold on the beams are uncannily reminiscent of the questions that dominate Emily Dickinson's poetry. Accordingly, Dickinson's work is the lens through which this thesis will examine and defend the liberal arts education because of her keen observation of the world, her deep understanding of the human experience, and the challenging questions her words pose. This thesis will do so first by looking at the purpose and mission of the University of Texas at Austin, as we have in the previous section, and then by drawing connections between the parallel themes in the university's values and goals and the themes and motifs in a selection of Dickinson's poetry.

The reason I chose to defend the liberal arts through a poet's works is because poetry is something a student would only learn if he or she were to study the liberal arts, and similarly to the liberal arts, it is often cast off as frivolous or unimportant. I chose Emily Dickinson in particular to highlight the undervalued importance of poetry and the liberal arts because her timeless words challenged existing definitions of what poetry is and was supposed to be during her time (Franklin 1). Moreover, she boldly calls into question the definition of the true purpose of poetry and poetry's work, and finally, she challenges the institutionalized ideas about the world that her works are about. Most importantly, however, Dickinson is able to cleverly synthesize the various aspects of our world and open the minds of her broad audience of readers to viewpoints that are beyond their own experiences and levels of comfort. In her poem "This was a Poet -," and throughout her work and life in general, Dickinson singles out the Poet not because of "His extravagance of diction or His musicality of utterance, but rather, first, for His unmatchable cognitive powers" (Vendler 213). She believed in the power of the mind and in the power of poetry. In this poem she illustrates that she has a firm understanding of the poet's ability to take what Dickinson calls "Ordinary Meanings" and distill from them "amazing sense," which she recognizes as the achievement of genius (Vendler 213). The first stanza of four-stanza poem is written below.

This was a Poet -
It is That
Distills amazing sense
From Ordinary Meanings -
And Attar so immense
(Franklin 468)

We have established that poetry has power, and this thesis will use Dickinson's words in attempt to illustrate that what a student can learn from something like poetry, a subject of study that many have called "pointless," can give students the foundation they need to create and

inspire change ("A Poetry Critic Asks: Why Bother?"). The liberal arts show students how to see things from perspectives unlike their own, whether it be from a historical standpoint, a religious one, one they learn from literature or poetry, or simply a point of view of someone who is different from themselves. If what starts here at the University of Texas truly changes the world, we need to start by reconsidering the value of a liberal arts education and all that it includes, and by giving it the funding, reverence, and consideration that it deserves. Dickinson also believed fiercely in the power and capacity of the human brain, and she believed in expanding knowledge not through classical schooling necessarily, but through human interaction and experience. In the following stanzas from one of her poems, Dickinson explores the seemingly limitless capacity of the brain by comparing it to nature, a common theme of exploration and learning throughout her works (Vendler 17).

The Brain - is wider than the Sky -
For - put them side by side -
The one the other will contain
With ease - and You - beside

The Brain is deeper than the sea -
For - hold them - Blue to Blue -
The one the other will absorb -
As Sponges - Buckets - do
(Franklin 595)

In these two stanzas from "The Brain - is wider than the Sky-" Dickinson implies that a person's brain is "capable of containing or absorbing, in its fullness, not only vast natural phenomena (Sky, sea) but also the human being perceiving those phenomena— 'and You - beside -" (Vendler 17). While this claim is a romantic one, it reveals just how powerful Dickinson believed our intellect as a species is. Furthermore, it shows the reader just how much we are capable of learning if we put forth the thought, effort, and general brain power, to learn about the world around us.

Emily Dickinson, an introverted and introspective girl who grew up to become one of America's most renowned poets, was born in Amherst, Massachusetts in 1830. She rarely left her home, had few visitors, and was once referred to by a friend as "the Queen Recluse," yet she was neither unpleasant nor disliked (Crumbley 247). Rather, the "Queen" part of that nickname might be more accurate in describing Dickinson than the "Recluse" part (Crumbley 247). Emily Dickinson was happy, healthy, precocious, and intelligent. She was quick-witted and an original thinker who impressed those around her with her sparkling imagination, strong opinions, and keen observation skills that she brilliantly put into written words (Crumbley 248). For her education, she attended the Amherst Academy for seven years during her youth, and later she briefly attended the Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, where she "acquired limited notoriety as the one student unwilling to publicly confess faith in Christ" (Crumbley 248). In her earlier formal schooling in general though, Dickinson dazzled her teachers. As her older brother, lawyer Austin Dickinson, once wrote, Emily's "compositions were unlike anything ever heard—and always produced a sensation—both with the scholars and Teachers" (Crumbley 248).

As I noted a moment ago, Dickinson had an interesting religious path and background. Dickinson was raised in a Christian household, attending weekly services and performing daily observances with her family, but as she grew up her internal struggle with her faith continued, and she agonized over her doubt about God ("Emily Dickinson and The Church"). Her writing reflects this struggle, and she often makes Christian and religious references, but includes a mocking or blasphemous tone along with the biblical names and plots ("Emily Dickinson and The Church"). Eventually ceasing to attend religious services and practice religious activities, Dickinson was not a Christian believer, but she undoubtedly was intrigued and tempted by

various aspects of the religion that her family practiced and that was blossoming around her in New England during her lifetime ("Emily Dickinson and The Church").

In addition to religion, Dickinson's poetry also reflects influences from other writers of her time, including Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, Bronte, and Browning, and it consistently challenges conventional restraints by taking on perspectives of "sharp-sighted observers" who understand the limitations of their societies ("Emily Dickinson"). However, even though Dickinson's writing was influenced by other writers of the time, the most prominent influences on her poetry were the world around her and the thoughts that lived within her own mind. Dickinson's love of nature is a clear theme throughout her poetry, and many of her works include mesmerizing descriptions of flowers, landscapes, and animals as her way of seeing the world or a particular aspect of the world from another perspective. She was keenly observant, and this is especially notable in her poetry about nature.

While on the surface some of her poems may seem to be simply about a squirrel or a bird, on a deeper level Dickinson focuses on what is possible for the world to be but what is not yet realized, and she manages to define meaning for her readers without confining it ("Emily Dickinson"). Although she was very introspective and perhaps considered somewhat of a recluse by some, Dickinson longed for relational love and companionship, and this topic is mentioned or alluded to in much of her poetry. The following two stanzas are the first of five from a poem that is most often thought to be either about Dickinson's beloved who is currently away or about her longing to meet a romantic companion ("Emily Dickinson—Love").

If you were coming in the Fall,
I'd brush the Summer by
With half a smile, and half a spurn,
As Housewives do, a Fly.

If I could see you in a year,
I'd wind the months in balls -
And put them each in separate Drawers,
For fear the numbers fuse -
(Franklin 380)

While Dickinson never married, her canon includes many magnificent love poems, raising questions about her love life outside of marriage ("Emily Dickinson's Love Life"). Scholars debate whether various male friends in Dickinson's life were actually love interests, and some question her sexual orientation, arguing that her close female friendships may have had a sexual aspect to them. In her poetry about love, as we see in the stanzas above, Dickinson succeeded in her "desire to write outside cliché" about love (Vendler 18).

The first volume of Dickinson's writing was published in 1890, four years after her death, and that was when her success and fame began (Sewall 226). Dickinson wrote nearly 1,800 poems during her 55 years. While none of her poetry was published under her name during her lifetime, her works have become widely known, and Dickinson is almost universally considered one of the most significant American poets in history (Sewall 7).

Dickinson's poetry is original, rebellious, and often incredibly difficult to understand for the average reader. The prose, paired with the abstractly described and introspective ideas, can make her particular ideas nearly impossible to extract from her hundreds of poems without delving deeply into each phrase and even each word of a particular work. Additionally, the nineteenth century audience at whom she targeted her poetry was versed in slightly different things than our twenty-first century society. Still, even then, Dickinson baffled complete understanding, and to begin to grasp all of her poems her reader should ideally possess and be well-versed in the King James Bible, just as she was, and they should also ideally have read the poetry of the English past as fervently as Dickinson had (Vendler 1). These authors include

Shakespeare, Herbert, Vaughan, Milton, Wordsworth, James Thomson, Keats, George Eliot, Emily Bronte, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Robert Browning and many others (Vendler 1). Despite the sometimes cryptic nature of Dickinson's poetry, there are certain themes that are explicit to anyone who has read a collection of her poetry, even if he or she may not understand exactly what is being said about each without further study of Dickinson's works. The themes on which this thesis will focus are those most prominent in Dickinson's poetry, and, significantly, they are those that are the focus of the majority of the quotations that are painted on the ceiling beams of the UT Tower library and that are meant to be the foundational guiding words to UT students. The fact that the University of Texas' values are the same as the themes present in Dickinson's poetry is the first hint that poetry is a worthwhile subject to study good place to look when a student is seeking answers to life's bigger questions. This thesis will further discuss five of these themes, which are truth, nature, the importance of words, identity and the self, and God and death. Because the quotation depicted on the outside of the Tower and reflected to everyone on the UT campus is "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free," we will start with truth as the first theme (UT Tower Library).

Chapter 2: Truth

The University of Texas at Austin—through its core values and the quotations inscribed and painted on its walls—advises us to seek the truth in order to learn the right, and that by doing so we will become free. The quotation boldly inscribed onto the Tower's exterior is echoed by the emphasis of Freedom as one of the university's six core values, which UT defines as a student's responsibility "to seek the truth and express it" (UT website: "Mission & Values"). However, the university does not explicitly tell students *how* to seek the truth, or more

importantly what "truth" can mean, as its definition is subjective to some degree. Because truth is sometimes a personal idea, it is a concept that must be explored by the individual in his exploration of himself, so unless a person studies the liberal arts and learns it for himself, students only formally study the idea of truth in kindergarten. Dickinson's poetry appeals to personal experience, and it is predominantly motivated "by an arrogant passion for the truth" (Wilbur 9). Dickinson once said, "the truth is so rare a thing…it is delightful to tell it" (Wilbur 9). Because of her passion for seeking and exposing the truth, many of Dickinson's poems continue the conversation painted in UT's Tower library by teaching us about what the truth *is* and *how* to do what the university expects of us, because once you discover the truth, what are you supposed to do with it?

Tell all the truth but tell it slant -
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind -
(Franklin 1638)

This poem, known only by its first line or by the number 1263, the place where it falls in order with Dickinson's hundreds of other poems, is one of her most famous works and can be and has been interpreted—like most poetry—in many ways. Because it is emphasized with a capital "T," the "Truth" Dickinson writes about holds the same air of importance to readers that the sole quotation boldly etched on the exterior of the UT Tower holds to students by being so conspicuous. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (UT Tower Library). Jesus Christ spoke these words thousands of years ago, and they have been preserved in the New Testament of the Christian Bible in the eighth chapter and 32nd verse of the Gospel of John. But

even if a student were to know that while he or she passed by the Tower, and even if it moves her or inspires him to seek that truth, they still don't necessarily know what those words mean. What does this quotation teach them as university students, and more importantly, how are they supposed to know how to "seek the truth?" What a student might think while walking by is that they want to be free, and therefore they want to seek and find the truth. But the thought might stop there, and the student may become distracted by some commotion surrounding the tower because of the elusiveness, ambiguity, and underlying complexity of that quotation. While by seeing and reading the words on the Tower a person can grasp that truth and seeking the truth is important, Dickinson's wisdom gives us something the Tower quotation does not: she gives us context.

While "truth" is not necessarily defined in these eight lines, a person can learn something about how the truth works by reading and studying this poem. Dickinson advises her readers to tell "all" the truth, which implies that a person can be tempted to tell only a part of the truth that is either acceptable to him or herself or to the person to whom he or she is speaking (Vendler 431). So, while Dickinson instructs her readers to tell the whole truth, she advises them to slant that truth, or tell it from a more mild perspective, because some people cannot handle the truth in its most blatant form, as it is sometimes a "superb surprise" (Franklin 1638). "Lightning to the children" is explained to ease their mind and fear with a kind, gentle explanation, and Dickinson gently advises that the truth must be treated the same way, as if it were lightning, so that people can absorb it "gradually" and without emotional injury (Franklin 1638). "Her purpose is not to hide [the truth] from those preferring untruth, but rather to mediate it, out of kindness, to those as yet too weak to bear its glare" (Vendler 431). "Tell all the truth but tell it slant -" teaches students that after they seek and find the truth, they must relay that truth in a way that is honest,

yet kind. This is true both of superfluous situations, as in protecting the feelings or emotions of another person, or in serious situations, in order to get a point across to fight for the subsequent "right" that follows the newly discovered truth (UT Tower Library).

Dickinson's "chief truthfulness lay in her insistence on discovering the facts of her inner experience," and Dickinson explores this larger truth in another one of her works titled "Much Madness is divinest Sense -" (Wilbur 10). Scholars believe that Dickinson wrote this poem around 1862 ("Much Madness Is Divinest Sense"). This brief, eight-lined poem is deceptive in that its meaning is much bigger than the brevity of its words. Not all of the ideas in "Much Madness is divinest Sense -" refer and relate to truth, so we will explore only those that do for the purpose of this thesis and its argument.

Much Madness is divinest Sense -
To a discerning Eye -
Much Sense - the starkest Madness -
'Tis the Majority
In this, as all, prevail -
Assent - and you are sane -
Demur - you're straightway dangerous -
And handled with a Chain -
(Franklin 613)

This poem generally alludes to the speaker being able to understand a larger, more "divine" truth by rebuking the notion of commonplace common sense, which Dickinson refers to as "the starkest Madness" ("Much Madness Is Divinest Sense"). This idea of common sense she explores is that of someone who does not further explore possibilities and perspectives, someone who accepts matters of the world as they appear on the surface and to the human eye. She recognizes the madness, or insanity, of accepting things at face value without challenging boundaries and asking questions. Dickinson was also mistrusting of the notion of the Christian God and of divinity in a religious sense; however, scholars know that Dickinson was inspired by

the transcendentalists of her time, such as Emerson, who spoke of "divinity" in a way that emphasized personal experiences and the role of nature in helping a person learn the "truth" ("Much Madness Is Divinest Sense"). It is believed that this is the way in which Dickinson is using the term "divine" to describe the truth.

With this interpretation, the connection between the liberal arts and the quest for truth is clear and simple. Dickinson implies that in order for a person to be able to understand a larger, more "divine" truth about the world that is larger than him or herself, that person would need to learn that truth through personal experiences and by experiencing nature firsthand. These types of experiences are fostered and taught in a liberal arts education through courses such as ethics, modes of reasoning, philosophy, and literature. Additionally, the liberal arts education goes one step further by giving students not only their own personal experiences, but also those of characters and figures from literature and history, which allows students to acquire a vast breadth of experiences from countless perspectives. Dickinson is also encouraging her readers to question their assumptions and the easy surface readings of the world for something more challenging, even if they are repudiated by the majority.

We have established that truth is one of the most important values of the university, as well as one of the most important things someone must seek and learn in order to live a 'successful' life. However, another one of the values that UT expects its students to uphold is honesty, which is the less mysterious cousin of truth. Dickinson, while sometimes cryptic and obscure, is nearly always frank and honest because she understands the weight and value of these qualities. Once, in a correspondence when she sent some poems to a friend, Dickinson wrote, "Candor is the only wile," meaning that "the writer's bag of tricks need contain one trick only, the trick of being honest" (Wilbur 10). She never fails to express her true and honest thoughts

and opinions, regardless of how they would have been accepted or rebuked during the 1800s in her conservative hometown of Amherst. Dickinson frequently mentions the idea of honesty in her works, and the objects to which she refers as 'honest' are quite intriguing. In her poem "An honest Tear," Dickinson explains honesty as sincerity, implying that an honest tear, or a person sincerely crying, is very powerful. In other works, she refers to her fingers, birds, and other things as 'honest,' but one stanza in her poem titled "I meant to have but modest needs" mentions the honesty she embodied as a child when she was trying to believe in God. This stanza, the sixth of seventh, is as follows:

That one so honest - be extant -
It take the Tale for true -
That "Whatsoever Ye shall ask -
Itself be given You" -
(Franklin 679)

In this poem she is exploring prayer as a child. She takes the promise from the bible—that if you pray and ask God for something then He will give it to you—to be literal. When she prays with all her might and does not receive what she asks for, she concludes that all children are "swindled" by this lie. Here, "honest" is synonymous with trusting and naïve, and "true" holds the same meaning as 'literally' (Franklin 679).

With each meaning and double meaning of "truth" or "honesty" that Dickinson implies in her poetry, there is a different lesson to be learned from reading it. Some of her poems, such as "Tell all the truth but tell it slant -" teach students practical ways to spread the truth in order to be moral or to get a point across effectively. Other poems show students the beauty and importance of nature, and others are somewhat of a warning to students to be trusting, but just skeptical enough that you are not naïve and do not take things too literally. Perhaps her most important lesson though is to "Tell all the truth" (Franklin 1638). This lesson ties strongly and closely to

the foundational quotation inscribed on the exterior of the UT Tower, which advises students that the truth will set them free. Additionally, it is the foundation for the one unattributed quotation that is painted on the Tower library's beams, and that is, "Let us in this university strike hands with the ancient and goodly fellowship of university men of all time…and pledge ourselves, as university men and Texans, to love the truth, and seek it, to learn the right and do it" (UT Tower Library).

As previously mentioned, Dickinson refers to many things as honest and true, but perhaps what she most frequently describes as so are elements of nature, like the flora and fauna she observes that surrounds her. Dickinson believes in learning from experience and has an unequivocal appreciation for the world around her. She sees these beings and elements of nature as the most "true" and "honest," which is perhaps why she has such a respect and reverence for them, unlike her distrusting, cynical, and skeptical outlook on humans and religion.

Chapter 3: Nature

Nature is another distinctive and defining theme throughout much of Dickinson's works. While it is not expressly discussed in the words engraved on UT's walls, in the quotations painted on its ceiling beams, or in its mission and core values, nature plays an important role in education, especially at an elementary level (Ward 24). The purpose of this thesis is not to discuss elementary education; however, many of the goals of liberal arts education are simply furthering the aim of elementary education. For example, both strive to teach the pupils about right versus wrong, to help them discover who they are and what they like, to instill in them a curiosity and passion for learning, and to inspire them to want to make the world a better place. "Humans are hard wired to need nature, because we are a part of it" (Ward 24). Dickinson

relished the natural beauty of the world (Tandon and Trivedi 147). She was incredibly aware of her natural surroundings, and she often used flora and fauna and her "psychological observation of herself and others" to interpret other aspects of her world (Vendler 157).

In her poem "A Bird, came down the Walk -" Dickinson describes a bird walking along, eating a live worm and drinking dew from some grass on his way. She then describes his encounter with her and her offering of a crumb, which frightens him and causes him to fly away (Vendler 157). Dickinson made much of her poetic observation in situations that many would consider ordinary, such as watching a bird hop around near her home in Amherst. This is the first lesson this poem teaches readers: to be observant and thoughtful about all things, because even the seemingly trivial things in the world have meaning, and no matter how small or insignificant something is or someone seems, there is always something to learn from it. As the ancient Jewish leader Ben Zoma says in Psalm 119:99, "Who is wise? The man who learns from all men, as Scripture says: *From all my teachers I have gained understanding.*" As we can see from this poem, Dickinson embodies this psalm and considers all beings—including herself—to be her teachers, and she values each one of them equally for the individual wisdom they each hold.

Within the 20 lines of this poem, Dickinson begins by chastising the bird for savagely murdering and eating an "Angle Worm" and portrays him as a hardened, cannibalistic criminal (Vendler 160). She then sees another "side of the crass murderer" as he daintily drinks a drop of "Dew from a…Grass," and when he sees her she notices that he is terrified, with rapid eyes "like frightened Beads" (Vendler 158). Finally, she concludes the poem with her observation of the bird "unroll[ing] his feathers" that "rowed him softer Home" (Vendler 157). As her emotions towards the bird fluctuate between extremes, the paradox here is startling and shocking for the reader, which is common in many of her works (Wilbur 10).

This is the second lesson Dickinson that teaches us through this poem, and it is about the good and beautiful versus the evil and ugly. As I mentioned earlier, humans are part of nature. We are animals with instincts and needs in the ecosystem of the earth. Here, Dickinson is teaching us about "the two sides of nature—the cruel, [and] the beautiful" (Vendler 160). In addition to teaching us about the sometimes ugly reality of the world, Dickinson also teaches us something about the power of positivity. She does this by ending the poem with the bird in the air, his native element, and by identifying him no longer as evil or afraid, but as beautiful, graceful, and effortless, something worthy of admiration (Vendler 160). This conclusion leaves the reader with a positive aesthetic picture of the bird. With this conclusion, Dickinson is teaching the reader that if you look at any situation from the right perspective and with the right attitude, then "the beautiful [always] has the last word" (Vendler 160).

Another one of Dickinson's works relating to nature is her poem titled "Growth of Man - like Growth of Nature -" (Vendler 336). In this poem, she beings by saying that the "Growth of Man - like Growth of Nature - Gravitates within -" and the third of four stanzas is as follows (Vendler 336).

Effort - is the sole condition -
Patience of Itself -
Patience of opposing forces -
And intact Belief -
(Franklin 743)

In the first two lines of this poem by Dickinson, she again emphasizes the connection between humans and nature, establishing yet again how important nature is in our lives and thereby in our education. Later on in the third stanza, written above, she touches on the ideas of Effort and Patience, but she does so in a very cryptic way, as is typical of her poetry. Through these four lines, Dickinson insightfully and correctly implies that the "first thing that human

Patience has to be patient about…is the human self" (Vendler 337). Learning to be patient with yourself and others is not explicitly written as a core value of the University of Texas at Austin; however, it is something that goes hand-in-hand with the things someone needs in order to uphold the university's core values. The way a person can uphold these values are through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect towards peers and community. Being patient with others is especially pertinent in order to respect peers and community, and being patient with oneself is important when trying to maintain inner values such as integrity, honesty, trust, and fairness.

When Dickinson writes, "Effort - is the sole condition -" she teaches us a lesson about the value of trying. "'Effort' is marked always by failure and slippage," which means that effort often results in failure, but the trick is to never give up because the ideal is never reached and growth is never complete (Vendler 337). This encourages students to keep fighting for what they believe in, even if the road to success is paved with failure and 'slippage.' This lesson can be equated with learning perseverance and determination, which are necessary to accomplish almost anything or inflict any change, especially if the feat is not an easy one. The final of the six core values of UT Austin is Responsibility, which the university defines as a student's responsibility "to serve as a catalyst for positive change in Texas and beyond;" therefore, in order to uphold the values of UT and accomplish the school's goal for its students, a person must learn this lesson (UT website: "Mission & Values"). Furthermore, concisely and explicitly stated, the single core purpose of the school is "to transform lives for the benefit of society," and transformation is defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as a "thorough or dramatic change," which will always take determination and perseverance to inspire in a pre-established way of life (UT website: "Mission & Values").

This poem also teaches us about humility, another trait that goes hand-in-hand with the core values of the university, by reminding students that there is always room to grow and improve, regardless of where you are, how you are, or who you are. Dickinson echoes this lesson about being humble in many of her poems, but also in the way she writes her poems. By so keenly observing the small things in life that many people never consider, Dickinson is reminding us that there is always something to learn from everything—no matter what or who it is—from the tiniest bug, to a blooming flower or a light breeze. This stance also offers a lesson in perspective and reminds students that no matter how smart they may think they are, or how much brighter than another being they may assume they are, there is always something to be learned from looking at a situation from another's perspective.

Another notorious Dickinson poem that explores nature and Dickinson's fascination with it is her poem "Nature, the Gentlest Mother," which is written below. In this poem, Dickinson reiterates a point made in many of her works, which is that nature represents purity and love, and that it far outshines any creation of humans.

Nature, the Gentlest Mother,
Impatient of no child,
The feeblest or the waywardest,
Her admonition mild

In the forest and the hill
By traveller is heard,
Restraining rampant squirrel
Or too impetuous bird.

How fair her conversation,
A summer afternoon, -
Her household, her assembly;
And when the sun goes down

Her voice among the aisles
Incites the timid prayer
Of the minutest cricket,

The most unworthy flower.

When all the children sleep
She turns as long away
As suffice to light her lamps;
Then, bending from the sky

With infinite affection
And infiniter care,
Her golden finger on her lip,
Will silence everywhere.
(Franklin 703)

In this lovely ode to mother nature, Dickinson personifies nature and depicts it as a gentle mother, which is one of the most benevolent images a person could imagine. Dickinson portrays nature's smaller creations, such as "cricket[s]" and "flowers," as nature's children, over whom she watches over tenderly and affectionately (Franklin 703). In the second stanza, she describes humans as the interlopers who are outsiders to nature, simply traveling through the forest, and she describes them as unwanted and frightening the birds and the squirrels, nature's beloved children. In response to these unwelcome human outsiders, as any good mother would do, nature attempts to protect her flora and fauna children from the uncleanness that these humans bring ("An Analysis of Selected Nature Poems by Emily Dickinson").

Dickinson loved nature fiercely, which is obvious to her readers. She had an incredibly sensible appreciation for all parts of nature—from the massive forests to each tiny creature, plant, and bug. Even when one of her poems is not directly praising nature, it still *is* because of the detail with which she observes and admires every aspect, being, and happening within nature's bounds. This poem, "Nature, the Gentlest Mother," explored above, sufficiently summarizes Dickinson's love and respect for nature, and this is one of the prime lessons that a student can and should learn from reading her poetry. This lesson is that we as humans are guests on this planet. We did not create it, and we have a duty to nature and to its future residents to

maintain it. This lesson comes with another lesson in selflessness as well. While it may be more convenient to live as we like with no regard to nature and the planet, we owe it to nature and the earth to maintain it the best we can, even though we ourselves will not be around anymore to reap the rewards. This is the epitome of selflessness, which stands in line with the core mission of UT, which is "to transform lives for the benefit of society" (UT website: "Mission & Values"). By maintaining our earth and preserving nature, we will indeed be transforming lives for the benefit of future societies, and for the benefit of societies we may have never considered before reading Dickinson, such as the societies of flowers and communities of birds and squirrels and bugs.

Another important lesson that students learn by reading Dickinson's poems about nature is that they should be observant and humble, understanding that no matter how insignificant or beneath them something or someone may seem, there is always something to be learned from another. Dickinson shows students this through her exploration of the actions and lives of the tiniest bugs and creatures, the most helpless flowers, and by then discovering something miraculous about herself or the world by observing these beings. This idea is also closely related to the core value of learning, which is defined by UT as "a caring community, all of us students, helping one another grow" (UT website: "Mission & Values"). Dickinson truly has the outlook that she is a student in all she does, and that everything and everyone she encounters is a teacher from whom she can learn something new. Dickinson's love of and reverence for nature and all that it consists of is obvious to her readers, and I, like many others, find it inspiring me to learn through nature and to think about nature in another way. She tells a slanted truth about nature to her readers, showing them another perspective they might not have imagined before, and opening their minds to the possibilities that new perspectives offer.

Chapter 4: The Importance of Words

Something emphasized both in the foundational words of UT as well as in Emily Dickinson's poetry is the importance of words. This might be one of the most important connections between the importance of a liberal arts education and the ultimate purpose of a higher education, because the liberal arts revolve around words and their various forms of expression. While this idea is not explicitly described in UT's mission statement or code of conduct, it *is* discussed through the quotations painted onto the Tower's ceiling beams, especially in the context of literature and books. (However, we must clarify and keep in mind that these books to which these historical figures are referring in their quotations are implied to be literature and not business or engineering textbooks.)

Obviously words are important. They are our primary mode of communication and expression and are an integral part of our society today. They are also how we preserve our history. But Dickinson explores words' importance with a new slant, offering students a new perspective and allowing them to think about and value words in a different way. Once again, the university describes the importance of words, while Dickinson's works go one step forward and give the university's advice some context for students. The importance of reading and learning the written word is covered in multiple quotations on the Tower's ceiling beams. The Scottish philosopher Thomas Carlyle's words read, "All that mankind has done, thought, gained, or been, is lying as in magic preservation in the pages of books" (UT Tower Library). These words of wisdom not only emphasize how much knowledge and history books contain, but they also credit books with preserving everything mankind has ever done or been. By doing this, Carlyle is also assigning books the duty of extending this knowledge on to all men (and women) who follow and are to come. Another quotation on the beams that discusses the importance of written words

and books is from the English Christian theologian and mathematician Isaac Barrow. His wisdom reads, "He who loveth a book will never want a faithful friend, a wholesome counselor, and cheerful companion, [or] an effectual comforter" (UT Tower Library). This is powerful, because here Barrow is equating books, which we can assume contain theology, math, and any other subjects he may have studied as a theologian and a mathematician during this time, to friends, counselors, companions, and comforters. Not only does he equate books to these important figures that nearly all humans seek and need for their personal wellbeing, but he does so in a way that implies that books are so successful in these areas of compassion and guidance that they can take the place of human friends, counselors, companions, and comforters, which is giving books a lot of credit. A third quotation that stands out to me was written by the English poet William Wordsworth in one of his poems titled "We Must Be Free or Die." It reads, "We must be free or die. Who speak the tongue that Shakespeare spake; the faith and morals hold which Milton held" (UT Tower Library). Besides the quotations that explicitly discuss and allude to the importance of words on the Tower's ceiling beams, perhaps the most important thing that may be overlooked is that all of these quotations on the Tower's ceiling beams and the core purpose and mission of the university are quite literally expressed *through* words.

Dickinson's poetic language echoes the importance of words both through the specific words she chooses as well as through their deeper meanings woven cryptically into her poems. In addition to her incredibly meticulous and careful word selection in each and every word she writes, one of the most noticeable and most unique things she does is capitalize certain words, seemingly randomly, in the middle of sentences. She capitalizes proper nouns as is typical, but she also capitalizes nouns, modifiers, and verbs that are normally lowercase. Her reasons for this interesting habit are not entirely clear ("Major Characteristics of Dickinson's Poetry"). Some

scholars believe that she capitalized interior words in addition to the words starting each sentence or line for no reason at all; rather, they theorize that there is no pattern and the capitalization is an unplanned accident, or that it is simply random and spontaneous. Because her poems do not seem to follow a capitalization pattern, even between themselves, this consensus is fairly substantial amongst some scholars who study Dickinson's work. Others believe that it is simply her way of establishing herself as unique and different from other poets of the time, which she certainly accomplishes. However, there is almost total consensus that by capitalizing those certain words, Dickinson is giving emphasis to them and drawing the reader's attention and thoughts to their meanings. There is also a group of scholars who believe that despite the seemingly random choosing of words, she actually selects each word she capitalizes for a specific reason—to draw the reader's attention—something that the capitalized words do regardless, which there is not a debate about. Those who support this argument believe that in addition to these words defining her unique style, these specific capitalized words also add symbolic meaning to and foster deeper interpretation of her poems. They believe that Dickinson capitalizes words that she deems important, and the capitalization causes the reader to pause for a moment to think further deeply about that word, why it is capitalized, and what its deeper meaning is both in the context of the poem as well as in the broader world ("Major Characteristics of Dickinson's Poetry").

In addition to her peculiar capitalization habit, Dickinson was very pointed and particular about selecting each word in every one of her nearly 1,800 poems. As we know, Dickinson's poems were published under her name only after her death, a few years after her father found them hidden and scattered about her room. But he did not just find one version of each poem; rather, he found dozens of versions of some poems with very minor—but important—edits.

These drafts show how much Dickinson thought about and carefully selected each word with purpose. For example, in her poem "This World is not conclusion." she could not decide between using the word "sequel" or "species" and flip-flopped between the two in a dozen drafts, ultimately deciding on the word "species" (Leiter 209).

Besides purposefully choosing each word she wrote, the other thing Dickinson does in her writing to emphasize the importance of words is to simply write *about* how important words are—specifically in the context of the importance of poetry—which ties to our earlier discussion of the purpose and debated value of studying poetry and of its value in general. The following poem describes the immense power Dickinson feels she has as a poet and the power she feels she creates simply by stringing words together in brief stanzas.

This was a Poet -
It is That
Distills amazing sense
From Ordinary Meanings -
And Attar so immense

From the familiar species
That perished by the Door -
We wonder it was not Ourselves
Arrested it - before -

Of Pictures, the Discloser -
The Poet - it is He -
Entitles Us - by Contrast -
To ceaseless Poverty -

Of Portion - so unconscious -
The Robbing - could not harm -
Himself - to Him - a Fortune -
Exterior - to Time -

(Franklin 468)

This is a paean to poets, including Dickinson, from Dickinson herself. She is praising the universal poet's ability to "Distill amazing sense" from "Ordinary Meanings" (Kornfeld). "Attar"

is a fragrant essential oil that is typically made from rose petals, and this "Attar" that Dickinson is describing is the essential oil *of life* that a poet is able to skillfully wring from life with her words (Kornfeld). She implies that this oil of life is much better and richer than anything the reader might have expected common rose petals to produce (Kornfeld). And when she says "immense," Dickinson is implying that just as the oil's fragrance fills the air, a poet's "perceptive insights fill readers up, too, until we wonder how we'd never seen things quite that way before," which Dickinson hints at in the second stanza (Kornfeld). In the third stanza, Dickinson again toots the poet's horn, proudly explaining his ability to show readers the meanings of pictures, and she dramatically claims that the poet is so gifted that those who are not exposed to his work and his words are in "ceaseless Poverty" (Kornfeld). Finally, in the last stanza, Dickinson declares that the poet has such good "Fortune" that even if he was "Robbed" of a portion of it, it would not harm him because he is so immersed in the art of his words he is "unconscious" of being copied or plagiarized (Kornfeld). Because of the high mental state which the poet achieves by studying and writing poetry, absorbing the wisdom of the liberal arts that we previously discussed, he stands "outside the flux that shapes and propels the rest of us" who do not know poetry; he becomes "Exterior – to time –" (Kornfeld).

In this musing about the power poets and their words hold, Dickinson reaffirms my previous claim that poetry is power. Another one of her works that emphasizes the power not only of her words, but also of herself as a woman, is her poem "My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun -" (Gilligan). This poem's deeper meaning draws the connection between a woman and the power of her words. "My Life" represents both Dickinson's life as well as all women's lives, and "a Loaded Gun" refers to the potential, sometimes dangerous, power that a woman has built up inside of her (Gilligan). My, Life, Loaded, and Gun are all capitalized, which Dickinson often

did with important words and ideas. The poem goes on to indicate that women have the potential to be powerful, but they often have to wait for marriage to dig into their power as women were tools of men during this time (Gilligan). However, Dickinson still makes note of how much potential power women—like she—possessed by using their words and stringing them together through poetry.

Dickinson's exploration of words and their importance offers students, her readers, many new things to think about and consider. First and foremost, she shows students how important words are by selecting each word carefully and using peculiar capitalization to draw attention to the ideas and meanings behind those words. Through this, she *shows* the power of poetry. The other way in which she expresses how important she feels words are is by explicitly telling her reader how important they are, as she does in "This was a Poet -" (Franklin 468). This poem, along with bits and pieces of others, reveals to us how important poetry is and the immense power that poets have. This power, which we discussed earlier in terms of Russia and Afghanistan, is so real, and is something powerful that should be studied by all students—or at least by more than are currently studying it. Furthermore, a truly *good* poet, such as Dickinson, holds even more power because of the "amazing sense" he or she is able to distill from "Ordinary Meanings" (Franklin 468). This is the ability to string together the perfectly selected words in the perfect order and to open up a person's mind in a way that the person may have never imagined could be possible. This is perfectly in line with discovery, which is one of the six core values of the university. UT defines discovery as "expanding knowledge and human understanding," and just as Emily Dickinson both shows and tells us, poetry has this incredible power to expand our understanding past limits we might have assumed it had (UT website: "Mission & Values").

In this final poem by Dickinson that explores the importance of words, we see how she can inspire other core values of UT, such as freedom and leadership. UT defines leadership as "the will to excel with integrity and the spirit that nothing is impossible" (UT website: "Mission & Values").

"Hope" is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

(Franklin 333)

Here, Dickinson explores the powerful idea of hope. Although she does not explicitly say that hope is a bird, she describes it as such by saying that it has feathers and "perches" and "sings the tune without the words" (Franklin 333). The way she uses words here gives students yet another thing to take away from her poetry, and that is an unfamiliar and intellectual way of exploring ideas and concepts in the world around them. Dickinson's largest category of poems and written thoughts consists primarily of "named and unnamed acts, creatures, concepts, [and] occasions" (Vendler 118). In this poem, as in many others related to the aforementioned topics, it is as if Dickinson begins her inquiry with the "general question, 'What sort of thing is this?' and then goes on to categorize it more minutely: a major thing or a minor thing, a present thing or an absent thing, a live thing or a dead thing" (Vendler 118). "Dickinson's relentless intellectual demand that experience be classified and defined leads to her inclination to place acts and

feelings first under the rubric 'thing,' and then to track the 'thing' back to specificity through various inner questions" (Vendler 118). This is a new and interesting way for a student to think about the biggest questions of life as he or she discovers and explores and learns in college. This new manner of learning and exploring topics, such as hope, truth, and God, which are typically very difficult to conceptualize, can show students a way to slant their thinking about these ideas and possibly grasp them more firmly and easily.

Chapter 5: Identity & the Self

Emily Dickinson can be considered many things — "epigrammatic, terse, abrupt, surprising, unsettling, flirtatious, savage, winsome, metaphysical, provocative, blasphemous, tragic, funny"—but if nothing else, she is unique, true to and understanding of herself and who she is and wants to be (Vendler 3). In a time and place in history when being a woman meant walking down a very narrow path of life if she wanted to be accepted by society, Dickinson bravely lived the life she wanted to live and understood exactly and precisely who she was, regardless of what society expected her to be. Her incredibly keen observation of not only the world around her but also the world within her mind causes readers to realize how truly introspective Dickinson was. The inner "workings of the mind and of thought" are a consistent, and perhaps the most prominent, of the perennial themes woven in throughout her poetry (Vendler 1).

"Actualizing identity and self-actualization are two of the main fundamental drives in human nature" (Doost, Nasim Jahedi and Leila Baradaran Jamili 337). As I recently learned in my Plan II psychology course, these are the ultimate needs of a human's psyche that appear once primary needs (things like food, water, sleep, safety, and security) have been satisfied. While

actualizing identity and self-actualization sound like the same thing, they actually are not. Actualizing identity is "becoming what one truly is," and self-actualization is when a person uses his ability to achieve the meaning of life, meaning "what a man can be, he must be" (Doost, Nasim Jahedi and Leila Baradaran Jamili 337). As we previously discussed, Emily Dickinson spent much of her life in isolation, surrounded by nature, or experiencing loneliness, and these introspective experiences allowed her to achieve her perfect self, or become what she truly was (Doost, Nasim Jahedi and Leila Baradaran Jamili 337). Because she was a self-actualized person, this allowed her to be fully aware of what went on in her internal word as well as what was going on in her external world. Dickinson was clearly aware of both. Self-actualization comes with a feeling of freedom, and Dickinson felt that this freedom was a type of wealth (Doost, Nasim Jahedi and Leila Baradaran Jamili 337). "My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun" reveals how essential she believed self-actualization and finding oneself was, and this poem discusses this self-actualization by "finding oneself through losing oneself in love" (Anderson 188).

This idea and feeling of freedom we see expressed in her poetry and in her relentless focus on truth are very reminiscent of the values of UT Austin. UT defines the core value of "freedom" as "to seek the truth and express it," and this is exactly what Dickinson does with every truth she feels and discovers about the world within and around her (UT website: "Mission & Values"). In the following poem, "I'm Nobody! Who are you?" Dickinson explores the idea of self in a way that also teaches the reader about humility, companionship, and privacy.

I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you - Nobody - too?
Then there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! they'd advertise - you know!

How dreary - to be - Somebody!
How public - like a Frog -
To tell your name - the livelong June -

To an admiring Bog!

(Franklin 279)

The overarching lesson Dickinson teaches us through this catchy, seemingly silly poem is very connected to the ultimate purpose of the liberal arts. Here, Dickinson is getting at the wisdom of a liberal arts education by celebrating the anomalies and contradictions of our uniqueness and our oneness, which is a very philosophical way of thinking. It teaches the reader humility and gives him a perspective of selflessness because it reveals to him that he is nothing special; or perhaps it shows him that he *is* special…just like everyone else. It is sort of like the cliché of we are all unique, yet we are all made out of a very finite number of elements, so we are also all the same. This gives readers the perspective that is sometimes hard to grasp as adolescents and young adults, and that is the perspective of valuing others as equal to—or maybe even more than—you value yourself. This idea is closely related to learning and individual opportunity, two of the six core values of UT Austin. UT defines learning as "a caring community" where everyone helps each other grow, and when defining individual opportunity, UT emphasizes that even though there is a very "diverse people and ideas," all of those people and ideas still unite and make up "one university" (UT website: "Mission & Values).

The second lesson contained in these eight lines of poetry is about companionship. Dickinson's cheeky words and punctuation are a façade, trying to cover up, yet still revealing, her true desire for companionship. Although Dickinson openly expressed her dislike for anyone publicizing their personal thoughts (which does not include thoughts privately shared) Dickinson, being human, would have still required and craved some form of companionship. Both of these sides of Dickinson shine through in this poem, because while the speaker—presumably Dickinson—is excited to meet someone, she is excited because by referring to that person as "Nobody," she is assuming that they share her views on the importance of privacy

(Franklin 279). Her use of the exclamation point in the line "I'm Nobody!" shows us that she is excited about being nobody, which is ironic because most people would like to be somebody (Franklin 279). Additionally, because she capitalizes "Nobody" consistently throughout the poem, we can infer that she thinks being "Nobody" is a good thing; in her mind, "Nobody" holds high esteem ("'I'm Nobody! Who are you?'").

From analyzing this poem, a student could take away any number of lessons, the first of which being that you should learn to be humble and value others equally to yourself. The second lesson a student might take away from this poem would be a very simplistic life lesson about accepting yourself, and that lesson is understanding that craving companionship is normal. Everyone experiences it and needs companions, and including other people in your life can often bring joy. Finally, by studying poetry and analyzing this poem, a person also learns that maintaining privacy to some degree is important in a person's life, and students also learn that being true to yourself and what you believe—for Dickinson it was that she believed strongly in being private and not sharing personal matters with the whole world, or the "Bog"—is important in maintaining personal satisfaction.

One of the poet's Dickinson read and revered, Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote, "To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, — that is genius" (Emerson 37). The following poem, "On a Columnar Self -" echoes Emerson's sentiments that Dickinson undoubtedly read and took to heart when writing.

On a Columnar Self -
How ample to rely
In Tumult - or Extremity -
How good the Certainty

That Lever cannot pry -
And Wedge cannot divide
Conviction - That Granitic Base -

Though None be on our Side -

Suffice Us - for a Crowd -
Ourself - and Rectitude -
And that Assembly - not far off
From furthest Spirit - God -
(Franklin 702)

This poem is very reflective of how Dickinson views herself: as a column. A column is associated with strength, stability, height, reliability, and durability, amongst other characteristics, and this allusion shows readers how Dickinson feels about herself and how she stands firmly and unmoving in her beliefs and opinions. This poem refers to the self that has shaped itself up like a column, and because it has done this, that self now embodies many of the column's aforementioned desirable traits. In the second stanza, Dickinson finds "relief at the certainty of the fact that such a person's conviction cannot be pried open by a lever or divided by a wedge" (Mitra). This conviction is what Dickinson equates to the "Granitic Base" of the column; just like this granite base, "the conviction of the columnar self has the strength and stability to not be easily dislodged" (Mitra). Dickinson stood lodged in her self-actualized, columnar self throughout her life, and her actualized identity shines clearly through her words.

Not only was Dickinson curious about identity and fascinated by knowing oneself, she was also true to her own self and the identity that she formed. This was true first and foremost for the way in which she lived her life. For example, Dickinson refused to conform to societal norms of her time by never marrying, living a somewhat reclusive life, and fearlessly expressing her strong and sharp opinions. However, in addition to staying true to herself in these areas, she also maintained her identity when it came to religion. Despite external pressure from the extremely Christian society of Amherst, from her religious family, and from her formal schooling, Dickinson refused to practice and publicly support a religion in which she was not

sure she believed. The courage it must have taken for Dickinson to live so authentically and honestly is one of the reasons why her poetry is so attractive and relatable, even over a century after her death. Additionally, her self-actualization shows students a type of freedom and truth that inspires a person to seek as well.

The following poem, "I'm ceded - I've stopped being Theirs -" is Dickinson's declaration of her full independence and self-actualization. It is her proclamation of staying true to herself, especially in the sense of being free from the church as we just discussed.

I'm ceded - I've stopped being Theirs -
The name They dropped upon my face
With water, in the country church
Is finished using, now,
And They can put it with my Dolls,
My childhood, and the string of spools,
I've finished threating - too -

Baptized, before, without a choice,
But this time, consciously, of Grace -
Unto supremest name -
Called to my Full – The Crescent dropped -
Existence's whole Arc, filled up,
With one - small Diadem -

My second Rank - too small the first -
Crowned - Crowing – on my Father's breast -
A half unconscious Queen -
But this time - Adequate - Erect,
With Will to choose,
Or to reject,
And I choose, just a Crown -
(Franklin 377)

Here Dickinson announces her break from the claims that church and her family made upon the child she once was and her movement from childhood to womanhood. It is a proud poem of self-confirmation (Rich 111). Even though this bold refusal to stand with the church was taboo in Amherst during the nineteenth century, Dickinson remains true to her beliefs and

proudly, almost arrogantly, proclaims her liberation from the religion that her family and society had forced upon her at birth. “They” in this poem refers to her family and the church (Franklin 377). This poem is Dickinson’s public revelation of her ability to make up her own mind, regardless of what was popular or accepted during this time. Her unwavering conviction throughout her life is inspiring.

People talk about college being a time to “find yourself,” and that is precisely what it is. Earning a degree is such a small part of college compared to the self-actualization and friendships and exploration a student does while she is there, and that is not just a personal opinion…it is *actually* the purpose of school! The six core values of UT are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Only two of those—learning and discovery—seem like they are explicitly related to studying and academia, but even those two are not defined as such. In its definition of learning, UT emphasizes being a part of a caring community and fostering personal growth in each other, and it defines discovery as expanding human understanding, which seems as if it is related more to the world around you and the self than it is to studying for a business 101 exam. Emily Dickinson is an impeccable example of what a self-actualized person looks and sounds like, which is an invaluable voice and example for students who are trying to find themselves and actualize their identities in college. Dickinson shows students what staying true to yourself and your opinions looks like, even if your beliefs are unpopular. In addition to doing that, she also presents questions and plants ideas and thoughts in students’ minds that help them explore their own personalities, find themselves, and actualize their own identities. A substantial part of Dickinson’s self-actualization comes from her refusal to proclaim her faith in God and stand with the church, and this strong and stubborn conviction is a very prominent theme throughout her work.

Chapter 6: God & Death

As we discussed in the previous chapter, one of the most important aspects of Dickinson's poetry, and of her life, was her exploration of Christianity. She lived during a time that was "defined by the struggle to reconcile traditional Christian beliefs with newly emerging scientific concepts," specifically Darwinism ("Emily Dickinson and The Church"). She was brought up in a Calvinist household and attended religious services with her family when she was young at Amherst's First Congregational Church, and her family held daily religious observances in their home, as was common New England during this time ("Emily Dickinson and The Church"). The church was incredibly influential on Dickinson's poetry. First, the music influenced her use of the common meter, on which many hymns are based, and second, she cryptically narrates her personal struggles with faith and doubt, which reflect her "society's diverse perceptions of God, nature, and humankind" ("Emily Dickinson and The Church"). Her tone regarding general religion and faith varies tremendously. In "This World is not Conclusion.", Dickinson personifies faith in a way that shows how finicky her own was, writing that "Faith slips - and laughs, and rallies -" when it is questioned (Vendler 14). Contrastingly, she sometimes expresses having faith as a necessity for humans, writing that "Faith - is the Pierless Bridge / Supporting what We see / Unto the Scene that We do not - " in another poem ("Emily Dickinson and The Church").

Dickinson agonized over her relationship with, and the existence of, God, and she ultimately decided not to join the church—despite her family joining—in an attempt to stay true to herself and her beliefs, her personal anthem discussed previously ("Emily Dickinson and The Church"). We know that this act was not out of defiance, but rather out of intellectual honesty and truth to self. Dickinson once said, "I feel that the world holds a predominant place in my

affections. I do not feel that I could give up all for Christ, were I called to die" ("Emily Dickinson and The Church"). Her skepticism, struggle with faith, and the budding scientific advances and discoveries of the time are revealed in the following poem ("Emily Dickinson and The Church").

"Faith" is a fine invention
For Gentlemen who see!
But Microscopes are prudent
In an Emergency!
(Franklin 234)

While her enthusiastic and poetic words about nature and the human experience certainly reflects the predominant place of the physical world in Dickinson's heart, religious ideas such as "omnipotence, infinity, and perfection" are also among her most frequent subjects (Vendler 14). Generally, Dickinson's remarks about religious preachers are wry, as we see in one of her poems when she writes, "He preached upon 'Breadth' till it argued him narrow -" (Vendler 14). Interestingly though, she often writes sympathetically about Jesus in her poems (Vendler 14). Many scholars believe this is because she found consolation that humanity had finally "conceived of a Deity capable of suffering" (Vendler 14). Despite this sympathetic outlook on the figure of Christ, Dickinson often felt differently about God, and this expression of anger with a God that she deems absent and uncaring is revealed in the following poem ("Emily Dickinson and The Church").

Of Course - I prayed -
And did God care?
He cared as much as on the Air
A Bird - had stamped her foot -
And cried "Give Me" -
(Franklin 580)

These words reveal Dickinson's anger with the God that she feels is absent and uncaring, which she reveals in his unresponsiveness to her prayers. Another poem that echoes similar

sentiments is her poem titled, “I know that He exists.” in which she implies that God is maliciously self-concealing (Vendler 166). Here, she describes his hiddenness as a game of hide-and-seek (Vendler 166). Similarly to the absence she describes in “Of Course - I prayed -,” Dickinson focuses on God’s “sadism in pretending he is available, and then not being so” (Vendler 167). By the end of the poem, Dickinson goes so far as to reveal that the God she is describing is actually indistinguishable from Satan.

While she was sympathetic to Jesus and obviously very angry with God’s allusiveness, the Christian promise of Immortality was the Doctrine that tempted Dickinson the most (Vendler 15). She was drawn to the promise that when she died she would be reunited with her already deceased loved ones, and this inspired a great deal of some of her most gripping poems. The following poem describes this moving and joyous reunion with her loved ones as she liked to imagine it (Vendler 15).

Of all the Souls that stand create -
I have Elected - One -
When Sense from Spirit - files away -
And Subterfuge - is done -
When that which is - and that which was -
Apart - intrinsic - stand -
And this brief Drama in the flesh -
Is shifted - like a Sand -
When Figures show their royal Front -
And Mists - are carved away,
Behold the Atom - I preferred -
To all the lists of Clay!
(Franklin 297)

As we see in this poem, her idea of an afterlife or of heaven is irreligious in that it mentions neither God nor the evangelistic joys of heaven (Vendler 99). Instead, it omits all celestial beings, and Dickinson describes only herself and her beloved being present in this imagined ‘heaven’ (Vendler 99). While this poem was strongly influenced by Christian thinking

(specifically about the afterlife and the day a person ascends to heaven), it was clearly not written by a Christian believer. This is consistent with most of her poems that refer to religion. They use Christian imagery and language, but Dickinson reworks it in some way, which is often "intellectually, blasphemously, or comically" (Vendler 16). An example of this use of Christian imagery but reworking of Christianity is in her use of biblical figures in the following poem titled "Abraham to kill him" (Franklin 1153).

Abraham to kill him
Was distinctly told -
Isaac was an Urchin -
Abraham was old -

Not a hesitation -
Abraham complied -
Flattered by Obeisance
Tyranny demurred

Isaac - to his children
Lived to tell the tale -
Moral - with a mastiff
Manners may prevail.
(Franklin 1153)

Here, this poem is undeniably influenced by Christianity, as Dickinson utilizes the characters and plots from the bible, but she also mocks theses plots, promises, and characters (Cooley 95). This particular poem is alluding to Abraham's "marching orders" from God, and she mocks this biblical storyline, questioning the "consequences which inequality of power promotes," or would promote, assuming this story were true (Cooley 95). Another fundamental aspect of Christianity that influenced Dickinson in writing this poem—whether consciously or subconsciously is unknown—is Christian music. This poem is "uniquely suited to 'Onward, Christian Soldiers,'" a hymn written by Sabine Baring-Gould in 1865, meaning that it was

written during the peak of Dickinson's life and would have been a hymn with which she was familiar (Cooley 95).

Death is also an incredibly prevalent theme throughout Dickinson's poetry, and her interpretation of death—and what comes after—comes largely from Christianity. In the following poem she makes a "joke on the doctrine of incarnation" (Vendler 269). Dickinson hints to her readers that she does not believe that divine affairs are very different from human affairs. She also implies that just as humans may not always be transparent, God may not always be—and in fact is not—transparent with his dealings with his people, the humans on earth (Vendler 269, 271).

God is a distant - stately Lover -
Woos, as He states us - by His Son -
Verily, a Vicarious Courtship -
"Miles", and "Priscilla," were such an One -

But, lest the Soul - like fair "Priscilla"
Choose the Envoy - and spurn the 'Groom -
Vouches, with hyperbolic archness -
"Miles", and "John Alden" are Synonyme -
(Franklin 609)

Although the Christian idea of death influenced Dickinson's own idea of death, she reshaped it "into many macabre reinventions of elegy" (Vendler, 16). Rather than understanding it in the Christian way that she learned as a child, one where the "resolved and virtuous soul, at peace with itself and God, expires without protest," Dickinson challenged the idea, imagining the extinguished soul and corpse in many poems, such as "Oh give it motion -" (Vendler 16). It seems that death was the one mystery, the one unintelligible riddle that Dickinson could not solve, and she alludes to this explicitly in her poem titled "Dust is the only Secret" (Vendler 16). She wrote poems about death consistently throughout her life, implying that her fascination with

this mystery was a lifelong standoff (Vendler 16). This incomprehensible fate of extinction that she and everyone she loved faced provoked her to write poem after poem, elegy upon elegy (Vendler 17).

Dickinson's general struggle with Christianity and her personal faith is illustrated well in her poem titled "This World is not conclusion." the first line openly announces her belief that there is somewhere "Invisible, as Music - But positive, as Sound" where our souls retreat once they have left our human bodies (Vendler 173). The period after the first line is not common of Dickinson, and it implies that she has no doubt that there is an afterlife. The second line confirms this, reading, "a sequel stands beyond" (Vendler 174). However, as the poem continues, Dickinson loses her confidence in this afterlife as she searches for evidence in various places and finds none (Vendler 175). She seeks external proof of this 'sequel,' looking first to Faith of the Christian soul. When she asks Faith to give her proof, it reveals itself to be an unsatisfactory and foolish witness, and it "slips – and laughs, and rallies," pathetically in Dickinson's opinion (Vendler 175). This "demoralizing demonstration of the feebleness of individual Faith" causes Dickinson to turn to the collective faith of the church, where she also finds no reassurance. Later in the poem, Dickinson turns to history, hoping to find wisdom from personified Philosophy and/or Sagacity, who shrug and declare Faith a riddle. Finally, she turns to scholars, who define it as a puzzle. Once she has exhausted all of her modes of inquiry in her search for proof of an afterlife with no such luck, the question continues to "[nibble] at [her] soul," and she leaves the reader with an uneasy truth about the "permanent instability" of faith (Vendler 173, 176).

Emily Dickinson's exploration and struggle with Christianity and God are not necessarily as teaching or "preaching" to her readers as are her other explorations; rather, this internal struggle preserved in her poetry provides students with guidance when thinking about the larger

questions in their own lives. Not only that, but Dickinson's own thoughts about religion inspire students to think, forming their own thoughts and questions. Her words teach students how to open their minds and question both the tangible world around them and the one that is invisible to their eye. Theology is something that students will only study in school if they are receiving a liberal arts education, which as we have established is down to as few as three percent of undergraduate students. But as we have discussed, exploring religion is a great way for students to absorb wisdom. The study of the liberal arts, and particularly of religions, foster the "cultivation of…virtues that are requisite for success beyond the academy" (Roche 10). Additionally, the study of a liberal education, including the study of religion, has a formative influence on students' "character formation and the development of a sense of…higher purpose or calling" (Roche 10). As I mentioned in the first chapter, there are many words of wisdom that are attributed to religious figures upon which UT and many other universities are built. Looking at UT in particular, there are golden quotations painted on the Tower's beams that are attributed to Jesus, Psalms, and biblical figures. These quotations were chosen over all other words of wisdom because they contain something special, something morally good, something that the founders of UT wanted to instill deeply in their students.

Chapter 7: So what?

This thesis is a slanted defense of a liberal arts education. Hopefully it convinced you of the true value of the liberal arts, but if nothing else, it made you consider a different perspective, and it showed you something through a lens through which you had not looked before. That is what an education in the liberal arts does for students. It exposes them to opinions that make

them challenge what they know and question the world around them and discover who they are and what they believe.

Poetry is one of the liberal arts subjects that shows students these different perspectives and introduces them to new ideas. There are millions of lessons waiting to be learned from poetry…and from philosophy and history and theology and science and literature and all the other areas of study that comprise a liberal arts education. But if you don't study these non-vocational subjects, you will have to learn the lessons they hold the hard way—if you are fortunate enough to learn them at all. Look at the world and all its problems from your own perspective, and then look at them from a million different slants, as many are as physically possible. Look at the world from Stephen F. Austin's perspective, from Pascal's, from Jesus's! And then turn around and observe it from Aristotle's, Rudyard Kipling's, Edith Cavell's, and Emily Dickinson's (UT Tower Library).

Like philosophy, history, logic, and other liberal arts subjects, poetry is not supposed to lead students to a rock-solid conclusion about the world; neither is college. Interestingly enough, this undervalued literary form and the overarching system of higher education have the same end-goal, and that is to inspire and encourage its respective readers and students to think outside of their comfort zones, to consider things they might have considered before, and to give them the tools to be able to make a change about these things where a change might be needed.

The American dream is changing, and an education in technology or business is replacing the study of the liberal arts. If you want to live a "good life," the new American dream, then you should "spend your days learning computer science and your nights coding. Start a technology company and take it public" (Zakaria 15). But what does 'good' mean here? It means profitable. It means comfortable. So what should you do if you want to live a 'good' life in another sense? If

you want to find out who you are and learn about the world, if you want to be a moral and ethical person, if you want "to transform lives for the benefit of society" (UT website: "Mission & Values")? If you want to live *this* type of good life, then you should study the liberal arts.

Emily Dickinson, "the Queen Recluse," who was somewhat of a loner and a pariah in nineteenth century Massachusetts, did not have a surplus of human connection and longed for companionship, as we can see in her poetry. Dickinson could almost be considered the anti-particle of connection in a sense. It is fascinating though, that despite her lack of connection during her private lifetime, her preserved written words allow readers to feel an intense connection with her, even 130 years after her death. This seems nearly impossible that a person's words could connect with people so long after their death, especially when the person could not connect in this way during his or her life. That is the power of poetry, and poetry is especially powerful and worth studying when it is as good as Emily Dickinson's. Of course her poetry is "good" because of the meter and rhythm and double meanings and allusions, but her ability to make readers connect with it is perhaps the most impressive aspect of all. This ability comes from the pure authenticity and honesty that Dickinson's voice embodies. It comes from the extreme courage it took her to be so vulnerable on paper when she was so strong and stubborn in her real life. Especially when contrasted with Dickinson's resilient opinions and her unwavering sense of self, revealing her vulnerability is truly a feat, and she shows it in nearly all of her poems. She shows it in her words where she longs for companionship, and she shows it in her struggle with religion, faith, and God.

We know that Dickinson was vulnerable, and we know that she is truly and purely authentic. The reason this makes her poetry so timeless and so effective at reaching her audience—regardless of the time and place where this audience lives—is because authenticity is

the most attractive and appealing quality one person can see in another (Brown). Even if someone is your polar opposite in beliefs and opinions and demeanor, if that person is authentic, you will be drawn to them and want to form a connection.

The people who dismiss poetry and the study of it, along with many others, think that poetry is so divorced from the real world, which is understandable reading Dickinson's romantically flowing words and cryptic religious poems. That is not true. Poetry could not be more germane to the conditioning of humans and what is going on in the world today, but unless a person formally studies poetry and the liberal arts, they will not know that, and they may never learn the wisdom which it holds in store for their lives and their futures. They may never truly be self-actualized and understand or discover their own beliefs. They may never question or challenge the world around them or seek the truth or learn the right, and without learning the right they cannot adequately do that right or change the world.

I feel that I must conclude this thesis with the caveat that the opportunity to receive a liberal arts education is a luxury, and that is not lost on me. It is a luxury not because it is a superfluity; rather, it is a luxury for a person who financially needs to guarantee that they will be able to get a job and earn a living immediately after graduating from college. For these people, the liberal arts education and the turbulent and diminishing place it holds in our current job market might not cut it. The unknown is too great a risk if a person's livelihood is depending on it. That being said, this thesis is not arguing that everyone should pursue a liberal arts degree. It is simply arguing for the value of such an education, and it is meant to encourage those who have the opportunity of this luxury to take that opportunity seriously and to consider the personal and future professional benefits that doing so will provide them.

There are some who feel that computational thinking should be incorporated into the liberal arts education. Computational thinking is the thought processes involved in formulating a problem and expressing its solution(s) in such a way that a computer, human, or machine can effectively carry out. I support the notion that computational thinking should gain more emphasis in the liberal arts, although I do think it is already present in certain aspects, such as in the critical thinking and questioning and in the logic and problem solving aspects of the curriculum.

The reason I feel computational thinking should be further emphasized is because the liberal arts education is the "software" for living, and vocational fields are the "hardware" in a sense. Vocations are the things you do, but the software determines who we are and the choices we make. For example, if a person studied engineering and is asked to build or create something for a particular purpose that may be unethical or harmful to others, but that person does not truly know herself, her morals, or how she feels about her potential creation's impacts, she may end up constructing the detrimental device. I realize that that is extreme, but it can be applied to many circumstances on a spectrum from harmless to world-shattering.

The Yale Report of 1828 says that the two great points to be gained in intellectual culture are "*discipline* and the *furniture* of the mind," which entails students expanding their minds' powers, and storing them with knowledge ("The Yale Report of 1828" 7). The liberal arts truly are the furniture of our minds, meant to hold vocational knowledge and further academic and intellectual understanding. Without that furniture, a person's mind may be jumbled in a way and may not have the same order, comfort, or harmony that it would have had with a liberal education.

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